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THE DESIRABILITY OF LATIN IN THE EIGHTH GRADE

BY WILBERT L. CARR
University High School

The question raised in this paper is whether or not it is desirable that pupils should begin the study of Latin at an earlier age than is at present commonly the case. The subject as stated is "The Desirability of Latin in the Eighth Grade," but much that I have to say would apply equally well to an advocacy of Latin in the seventh grade or even earlier. The majority of pupils in this country begin Latin in the ninth grade, that is to say in the first year of their high-school course. That this is the case is due to the organization of our public-school system, which consists usually of an elementary school of eight grades plus a high school of four grades. And this organization is in turn the result of a series of accidents in the early history of American schools, rather than of any reasoned-out theory of education. There is no European parallel to such an organization, no basis for it in the physical and mental development of the pupil, in short no argument for it except the fact that it exists. Most authorities on education insist that an elementary school of six years plus a high school of six years or perhaps five years would much more nearly meet the needs of the pupils, and many believe that this is the type of school organization to which we shall presently come. Another plan which meets with considerable favor calls for an elementary school of six years, an intermediate or lower high school of three years, and an upper high school of three years.

Meantime in many schools something of the same result is being secured by the introduction of certain so-called high-school subjects into the upper grades of the elementary school. German, French, algebra, science are among the subjects which are being taught with success in the seventh and eighth and in some cases still lower grades. The question is: Is Latin such a subject? And

if so, what are the best means of introducing it and the best methods of teaching it to pupils below the high-school grades.

If we set aside for the moment the administrative problems involved, it seems to me that there can be only one answer to the question. In the acquiring of a correct pronunciation, in the memorizing of forms and vocabulary, in learning to read and write by imitation, the advantage unquestionably lies with the pupil of twelve or thirteen as compared with the pupil of fourteen or fifteen. This statement is not based merely on educational theory. Experience in English, Scottish, French, and German schools and in a considerable number of American schools proves the truth of the statement. The Blake School at Minneapolis, for example, successfully introduces Latin into the fifth grade along with English grammar, and carries the subject through the sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades, thus approximating the curriculum of the English and Continental schools. In this school the effort is to make the organization meet the educational needs of the pupil, instead of the reverse. Permit me to quote from the headmaster, Mr. C. B. Wilson, who says:

This plan for Latin I have deduced as a result of my observation for a dozen years in Lawrenceville, where I saw boys of about fourteen or fifteen coming in from all over the country handicapped in their study of Latin by their late start. So far, we have found that the experiment entirely justifies itself. Little boys take to the Latin with avidity, and their memories are in much better condition to acquire forms and vocabulary at ten than they are at thirteen or fourteen. We believe that we shall make real Latin scholars out of most of them, in the sense that they will have a firm grip on the language and their minds will develop under its logical requirements.

In Lincoln, Nebraska, the brilliant children from the various elementary schools are transferred at the end of their sixth-grade work to a special school where they are given the opportunity to do seventh-, eighth-, and ninth-grade work in two years. In these two years they complete, in combination with seventh- and eighth-grade English, the regular ninth-grade Latin and then take up the second-year work in the high school.

In Grand Rapids, Michigan, Superintendent William A. Greeson has tried in a few elementary schools the experiment of combining

technical English grammar with Latin in the seventh and eighth grades. He states his conclusions as follows:

We begin the study of technical grammar in the seventh grade. By being taught Latin and English grammar together, pupils will leave the eighth grade with a better knowledge of the English grammar and with a year's work in preparatory Latin more thoroughly done than is possible in the first year of the high school. In other words, the English grammar is better done and they have a year of Latin to their credit. I have found that the pupils enjoy this combined Latin and English better than they do English grammar alone. I am thinking of recommending that this be the practice in our schools. Of course, there comes the difficulty of finding teachers who can do this work.

This last sentence brings up one serious administrative problem involved, the difficulty of securing teachers prepared to do the work. In most of the school systems where the teaching of Latin is being successfully carried on below the high-school grades, there exists some form of departmental instruction comparable to that of the high schools. On the other hand, wherever the experiment of Latin in the grades has been tried and has proved unsuccessful the failure can usually be attributed to the difficulty of securing teachers who are able to teach Latin along with reading, writing, spelling, history, geography, English grammar, arithmetic, music, drawing, and gymnastic dancing. This was one reason for the failure of the plan in Chicago some years ago. I understand that another obstacle to success in the Chicago experiment was the lack of sympathetic co-operation on the part of high-school teachers of Latin. With what it seems to me was lamentable shortsightedness the high-school teachers often refused to accept the work done in the grades, and insisted on starting the pupils all over again—a most discouraging procedure for the pupils and the grade teachers alike.

In some cities, for example in Detroit, Michigan, the administrative officers solve this problem of instruction by assigning the Latin classes in the elementary schools to regular high-school teachers.

In Indianapolis the work of the seventh and eighth grades is organized by departments, with special teachers for special subjects. I know more intimately the system employed in these schools, as

I was for three years supervisor of the Latin in the two high schools and the ten grammar schools in which Latin is taught. The plan adopted there is to combine Latin with technical English grammar in the eighth grade, with the result that the pupil secures credit in English grammar and in addition credit for one half-year's work in Latin on entering the high school. Only the stronger pupils are allowed to elect the Latin-English combination. In some cases the more capable students in the second half of the seventh grade are allowed the same privilege. These pupils of course gain a half-year in promotion in addition to the extra half-unit in Latin. A similar plan is employed for algebra, German, and English, and so it is not uncommon for a pupil to enter high school with four half-units of high-school credit and thus be able to complete the high-school course in three and a half years. Obviously such pupils would not be likely to secure four years of Latin if they did not begin the subject before they entered high school. Of a class of twenty-seven now completing Vergil in one of the Indianapolis high schools, nineteen entered with credit from the eighth grade, and only eight began Latin in the high school. These Latin-credit pupils are among the best in school, and are, to use one teacher's expression, "a perfect delight." Those few pupils who elect Latin in the grades and fail to receive credit repeat the subject in high school with added chances of success.

In response to an inquiry addressed to an eighth-grade teacher who has the Latin in one of these departmental schools, I received the following statement, which I quote verbatim as stating a typical case from the teacher's point of view:

I am very glad to have the opportunity of saying that I think the plan of introducing the study of Latin in the eighth grade of the grammar school is an admirable one. This is the seventh year in which Latin has been offered as a subject in the Irvington School. At the present time 50 per cent of the eighth-grade pupils are taking Latin and more would take it if permitted to do so. The daily program provides only one teacher of Latin and one period for its study, and as it is unwise to make classes too large, often the number taking the subject must be limited. Some semesters we cannot have a Latin class at all because the eighth year is not large enough to separate into two divisions, and no pupil is ever forced to enter a Latin division.

At the beginning of the present year, in September, twenty-eight pupils of the eighth grade began the study of Latin in one class. At the end of five

months' study there were no absolute failures, but two pupils who were not unusually strong in any of their work were asked to drop the two high-school subjects. This means that 92 $\frac{1}{2}$ per cent of a class of twenty-eight pupils did creditable work. The class has twenty-six pupils now and is doing good work.

I cannot tell what percentage continue the subject for any length of time in the high school, but the number selecting it as a subject when they enter from the grade school is gratifying.

We have no regular meetings now, but the Latin teachers in the grades often confer, in order to keep our classes moving at much the same rate. I think our regular meetings with the supervisor, early in the introduction of the study, set a standard for character of work and rate of progress, for we have found when consulting each other, and when receiving transfers from other buildings, that our progress has been much the same.

We have a uniform examination at the end of the term. The questions for the examination in January, 1914, were made by a committee—a teacher from Shortridge High School, a teacher from Manual Training High School, and a supervising principal of the grades.

In my own experience this year the Latin division of the 8B class made a grade of 89 per cent in Latin, and 85 per cent in English grammar, while the English section of the class did not reach a grade of 70 per cent. This is not because the Latin division is that percentage stronger in all work, or that all the English grammar was taught to the Latin section. I feel that much of the difference arises from the fact that Latin is conducive to good habits of study. The children generally welcome the subject because of its definiteness. I am also glad of its help in the work in reading. Its assistance in working out new words is valuable.

I sincerely wish to advocate the study of Latin in the advanced grades of the grammar school.

This teacher adds in a personal postscript: "I have an excellent class this year, and am enjoying my work. It's the one time in the day when I do as Dr. King says, 'chuckle while I teach.'"

Another Indianapolis teacher says of the Latin: "It is a very satisfactory substitute for eighth-grade grammar, and makes much more intelligent readers and spellers of the pupils who have taken it—in fact, gives them a noticeable increase of power in handling the English language and comprehending it."

Still another adds this point: "I favor Latin in the eighth grade if for no other reason than that it is something new and fresh—a new interest for the child. The Latin classes are so busy that they learn to use their time well and form better habits of accuracy, punctuality, and even attendance."

Cases are given by several teachers showing that not infrequently pupils who would otherwise drop out of school are carried over into high school by this new-found interest.

I am indebted to Professor Nutting of the University of California for much valuable information in regard to the rather extensive experiments being carried on in some of the schools of his state. Professor Nutting kindly sent me in advance the material which he has since published in the *Classical Weekly* for March 21. In Berkeley, Los Angeles, Palo Alto, and Oakland there have been organized what are called intermediate schools or lower high schools. These schools receive the pupils from the elementary schools at the beginning of the seventh grade and carry them through the eighth and ninth grades. Instruction in these schools is organized on the departmental basis, and Latin, German, French, and Spanish are among the subjects offered. There is much to commend such a plan from the point of view of general educational reform. The principal of one of the schools says:

The seventh grade seems an ideal place to begin the study of a foreign language because the general elementary work has been finished and, with the beginning of the adolescent period, the pupils are ready to try new things. They are not yet self-conscious and are willing to make the peculiar efforts necessary in "twisting the tongue around" a new set of sounds. Our pupils did remarkable work in acquiring a perfect pronunciation and making as rapid progress in actual amount of work covered as ordinary high-school students. Besides, they did not lose anything in their other subjects but seemed rather to acquire new interest.

It is the plan in these California schools to devote the whole of the seventh and eighth grade to work below the grade of Caesar, though more ground is covered and much more thoroughly than in the ordinary ninth-grade or first-year high-school classes. The superior preparation of these pupils over that of the regular ninth-grade product has been repeatedly shown by comparative examinations and by the greater ease with which they handle the reading of Caesar, though they are one year younger at the time than the other Caesar pupils. Some of the reasons assigned for this superiority are:

1. Greater interest, enthusiasm, and responsiveness on the part of the younger pupils. A single visit to these classes will convince the most skeptical as to this fact.

2. Greater ease with which the younger pupils learn pronunciation, forms, vocabulary, and the "knack" of reading, writing, and translating. They seem fairly to absorb their Latin.

3. Greater thoroughness and accuracy, because a greater amount of time is given to the subject, i.e., two years instead of one. There is time for games and for the employment of other devices involving the play element.

4. Better teaching, partly as a result of the reasons just stated, partly because there is better opportunity for correlating the pupil's work, better supervision of study, and perhaps most of all because the grade teacher knows or is forced to learn that it is the "child" which is to be taught and not the "subject." As one teacher puts it: "Latin in the grades *has* to be taught in such a way that it becomes a part of the child's experience." In most seventh and eighth grades no home study is allowed, and the teacher is compelled to adopt or invent methods to meet the situation. The result is more teaching and less assigning of lessons and hearing of recitations.

5. Fewer distracting influences than those which beset the first-year high-school student, due to great changes in the pupil himself and in his relation to his social environment, as well as to a change in school building, discipline, and in methods of preparation and reciting his lessons.

One advantage mentioned above deserves repetition and emphasis, and that is the immensely greater probability that the pupil who begins a language at the earlier age will acquire a larger and surer working vocabulary, and escape forming the "dictionary habit," that time-wasting, soul-destroying curse of so many language students. This advantage alone, I am almost ready to say, is a convincing argument for the desirability of beginning Latin in the lower grades wherever the school organization makes this at all possible.

That the total number of Latin students in a given school system would be increased by this method is to be expected, and statistics show that the expectation is realized. Also it is clear that pupils entering the high school with a half-year's or a year's credit in Latin will stand a better chance of completing the four-

year Latin course, even though they remain less than four years in the high school. The situation in the Indianapolis Vergil class mentioned above is a case in point. It is not likely that many of the nineteen pupils who entered high school with a half-year's credit would remain an extra half-year in order to complete the four-year Latin course. Those who do remain the full four years may take up Greek, or additional reading in Latin, where such courses are provided, as, for example, in two Los Angeles high schools where two years of college Latin are offered.

Another point not to be overlooked is the small number of failures in classes made up of seventh- or eighth-grade pupils as compared with the frightful mortality among beginners in the average high-school class. It is a maxim in the business world that a satisfied customer is the best advertisement. The maxim applies equally well in the school world, and the reverse is especially true: a large number of dissatisfied and failing students is the worst possible recommendation for a subject.

It is sometimes said in opposition to the plan we are here advocating that pupils in the seventh or eighth grades are too immature to grasp the complexities of a highly inflected language. That is a valid objection only to those who consider the abstractions of formal syntax the first and most important element in the learning of a language. However, for such a method the high-school Freshman or Sophomore will be found to be almost equally immature. Any student, whatever his age, really "picks up" much more of a language than he rationalizes into his system, or at any rate he must "pick up" a great deal in the way of vocabulary and forms before the rationalizing process can possibly begin. The late Professor Johnston's dictum "never teach today what you can put off till tomorrow" applies particularly to the teaching of formal syntax, but it does not apply to the learning of forms and the acquiring of a vocabulary. For these features of language study the earlier the better. There is every reason to believe that the children in ancient Rome learned to understand and use considerable Latin long before they had reached the high-school age. At any rate we know that for the past three hundred years nine-year-old German boys have been taking up the study of Latin with an enviable degree of success.

If any college or high-school teacher has any lingering doubts as to the feasibility of the plan, he need only to visit a normal seventh- or eighth-grade Latin class to be convinced; or better still, let him undertake the teaching of such a class. He will learn something to his advantage about children and probably about *teaching*.

At the University Elementary School pupils are promoted to the high school at the end of the seventh grade. The class promoted last year is now doing full first-year work in Latin, with grades averaging a little above that of the regular ninth-grade pupils who were received from the eighth grades of the public and other private schools. One of our teachers who has two of the ninth-grade classes took charge of this eighth-grade class one day last week in the absence of their regular teacher. The substitute teacher's rather breathless comment after the experience was: "Why, they're the brightest things I ever saw!"

Last year the writer had the pleasure of teaching an eighth-grade Latin class of volunteers who met after school hours. There was no study permitted outside of the forty-minute period except in the case of absence. A full year's work was completed, and all these pupils are now doing very satisfactory work in Caesar.

Entirely unworthy of any consideration is the objection sometimes raised that there are not the proper books and other materials at hand nor the proper methods yet developed for work in these lower grades. If this is the case it is only a challenge to find or create them.

I am sorry to say that some high-school teachers have been known to exhibit an unbecoming jealousy in connection with any proposal to place present high-school subjects farther down in the curriculum. Perhaps in some cases there is also a fear for their jobs. It may be that the solution of the most serious difficulty in the way of offering Latin in the grades—namely, that of securing properly equipped teachers—is to be met by transferring some of the better high-school teachers to the grades. This would help toward remedying a great fault in our present educational system, the lack of closer co-operation by departments between elementary and high schools.

Students of educational problems tell us that a reorganization of our whole educational system is imminent, and we have but to look about us to see that the reorganization is already going on. The question before each of us then is whether we shall take advantage of whatever opportunities are offered to enlarge our borders, in the only direction left open, or sit idly and indifferently by and allow further encroachments to be made by subjects whose intrinsic worth as educative instruments we believe inferior to our own, but whose advocates have the foresight and energy to urge their claims upon public attention.